

From the [Federal Times](#)' Steve Losey:

House Democrats are calling on the chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee to pare back his request to dozens of agencies to divulge details of Freedom of Information Act requests from the last five years.

The committee's request "will encumber every agency with a work-stopping diversion" and have a chilling effect on the public's willingness to make use of FOIA, Rep. Peter Welch of Vermont wrote in a letter Tuesday to the committee chairman, Darrell Issa, R-Calif. A committee spokesman said Welch's recommendation is under review.

Last month, Issa asked dozens of agencies, ranging from the Justice Department to the Railroad Retirement Board, for their FOIA logs from the past five years, along with all communications with requesters and a rundown on how each request was handled. The oversight committee "is very interested in ensuring that all federal agencies respond in a timely, substantive and nondiscriminatory manner" to FOIA requests, Issa said in a Jan. 25 letter that set a Feb. 15 response deadline.

But the time needed to comply with Issa's demand could hurt agencies' FOIA compliance rather than help it, the committee's top Democrat, Rep. Elijah Cummings of Maryland, [wrote in a separate letter last week](#) that was also signed by Welch and Rep. Gerald Connolly, D-Va. The three urged Issa to seek only FOIA logs at this time and convene a forum for FOIA officers to discuss ways to improve operations.

Although the names of FOIA requesters are generally public record, the Democrats also questioned the potential impact of consolidating the names of all requesters in a single database. Because Issa's office had disavowed any interest in the private citizens who make the requests, they wrote, "it is unclear why the committee needs the identities of specific FOIA requesters."